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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The guides are written under the direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. Because it reflects the input of the committee, the guide does not solely or necessarily represent precise intent of the author(s).

John: *The Beloved Gospel*

Inspiration has left us with four distinct versions of the life of Jesus, those found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, commonly known as the four Gospels.

We might think that one version of the gospel story would be enough, as long as it were inspired by God. But the Holy Spirit provided us with four versions, each with its own unique perspective on the life, ministry, teaching, and sacrifice of Christ. The greatness of Jesus is such that no single inspired writer fully could communicate it; hence, there's more than one account. As Ellen White so succinctly expresses it: The gospel story was given "through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21. One, simply, wasn't enough to do it justice.

By using different accounts, God meets a variety of readers where they are. Each Gospel writer "has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds."—Page 22. In the past century, some literature has taken up the approach of recounting the same story from different perspectives, a move that was deemed new, innovative, and progressive at the time. How interesting that our Lord did the same thing nineteen centuries earlier.

In film and biography (such as the book *The Desire of Ages*, by Ellen G. White), many have sought to share a combined picture of the life of Jesus, based on all four Gospels. These efforts have been a great blessing. People of varied backgrounds and ways of thinking will gain a richer experience with Jesus as they interact with the variety of emphases provided for us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Much is to be gained, however, by focusing on the unique perspectives of the individual Gospel writers. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, each writer put his own unique perspective on the life and teachings of Jesus. This quarter we look at John's.

John's often has been called "the beloved Gospel." Its author is repeatedly called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (*John 13:23-25, 19:26, 20:2, 21:20-24*). His book, therefore, was written by one who

was especially intimate with Jesus, in the same way that Jesus was intimate with His Father (*compare John 1:18 with 13:23*). Out of this deeper understanding came a Gospel that probes the depths of Jesus' character and mission in a way that its other three counterparts do not.

Also, unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Fourth Gospel seems uniquely designed to speak directly to a generation who had no access to anyone in physical contact with Jesus.

Every generation since has faced this same problem, so John speaks directly to us in a way the other Gospels do not. His Gospel was designed, therefore, to answer what may be the

John's Gospel answers the question: How can I have a relationship with Someone I cannot see, hear, or touch?

most crucial question of contemporary Christian faith: How can I have a living relationship with Someone I cannot see, hear, or touch?

The dual focus of this quarter's Bible Study Guide, therefore, is on the unique picture of Jesus provided in the beloved Gospel and on the steps that the Gospel provides toward a deeper and more genuine relationship with Jesus. John, with his own unique stamp on the Gospel, has provided a powerful source of encouragement, hope, and faith for the millions who have learned to love our Lord through what the inspired disciple has placed in it.

John Paulien, the author of this quarter's Bible Study Guide, is chair of the New Testament Studies department at Andrews University Seminary and a recognized expert in the writings of John. Thus, we are privileged to have his insights this quarter as we—who have never met Jesus in the flesh—study the account of someone who did and who shares his life-changing experience with us.

May it change our experience, as well.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

- ▶ **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.
- ▶ **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.
- ▶ **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner's investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.
- ▶ **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.
- ▶ **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.